

Adult Abuse Can Happen to Anyone

If you suspect abuse, you can do something about it. First, recognize the signs. Then, report the situation.

- **Any Setting**
 - If immediate, serious risk, call the Police (911)

- **Domestic Setting**
 - If the suspected abuse, neglect exploitation occurs outside of a nursing home or personal care home, you should contact Adult Protective Services at the Department of Family & Children Services in the county where the victim is located. Your report is confidential and the law protects anyone who reports abuse from civil or criminal liability when acting good faith.

- **Personal Care Home Setting**
 - The Personal Care Homes Program of the Office of Regulatory Services is responsible for investigating reports in personal care homes.
 - Call: (404) 657-5728 or (toll free) 1-800-878-6442

- **Nursing Home Setting**
 - The Special Services Section/Intake & Referral Unit of the Office of Regulatory Services is responsible for investigating reports of abuse in nursing homes.
 - Call: (404) 657-5728, (404) 657-5726 or (toll free) 1-800-878-6442

- **The Long-Term Care Ombudsman** is authorized to investigate cases in personal care homes and in nursing homes.
 - Call: Your Area Agency on Aging or (404) 657-5319, or 1-888-454-LTCO (5826)

Who Should Report?

EVERYONE.

You are required by law to report if you reason to believe that a disabled adult is abused, neglected or exploited and you are:

- A physician, osteopath, hospital or medical personnel.
- A dentist, psychologist, podiatrist or nursing personnel.
- A direct care worker, social worker or law enforcement personnel.

What to Report?

Give as much information as you can.

- The adult's name, address and age.
- Nature and extent of the injury or condition.
- Name and caretaker.
- Any other information related to the problem.

Abuse of older and disabled (age 18 and over) people is one of the most under-recognized and under-reported social problems in the U.S. Only one out of 14 incidents of elder abuse actually comes to the attention of law enforcement or protective services agencies.

Adult abuse is the mistreatment or neglect of an elderly or disabled (age 18 and over) person, usually by a relative or other caregiver. At greatest risk are the frail and/or isolated, but residents of nursing homes and personal care homes may also be victims.

Various laws in Georgia protect elderly and disabled (age 18 and over) adults from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and fraud. The laws protect them whether they are living in their own homes, with relatives, personal care homes, nursing homes, or are homeless.

Law enforcement, medical, day care, human services personnel are required to report suspected cases. All other persons are encouraged to report suspected abuse to protective and regulatory agencies. Confidentiality is important and respected. Persons who report in good faith are immune from liability.

These agencies will investigate the situation, offer assistance to the victim, and arrange for protective services for any adult who consents to services. An assessment of the need for legal intervention will be done when the adult lacks the capacity to consent to services.

Georgia Law Defines:

Abuse as the willful infliction of physical pain, physical injury, mental anguish, unreasonable confinement, or the willful deprivation of essential services to a disabled adult.

- Pushing, striking, slapping, pinching, beating
- Improper use of restraints or medications
- Withholding food, water, medications
- Psychological or emotional abuse
- Verbal berating, harassment, intimidation
- Threats of punishment or deprivation
- Isolating victim from family, friends, or activities
- Sexual harassment or rape

Neglect is the absence or omission of essential services to the degree that it harms or threatens the physical or emotional health of a disabled adult.

- Failure to provide basic care or needed services

- Failure to provide shelter, clothing, food, medical care
- Ignoring or “silent treatment”
- Leaving person alone for long periods of time

Self-Neglect

- One’s inability to basic daily needs
- Unable to provide for own care
- Unable to provide self with food, shelter, clothing
- Unable to make decisions to meet basic needs

Exploitation is the illegal or improper use of a disabled adult or that adult’s resources for another profit or gain.

- Taking away one’s money or property by force, threat, or deceit
- Misuse of financial resources for another’s gain
- Sexual exploitation

Who are the victims in domestic settings?

- Any elderly or disabled (age 18 and over) adult can be a victim.
- Typically, the person most at risk of abuse is a woman age 75 or older, who has at least one physical or mental impairment and is dependent on relatives for care.
- A victim is usually unaware of alternatives.
- A “disabled adult” includes persons with mental illness, physical disabilities, mental retardation or substance abuse problem.

Who are the victims in institutional settings?

- Dependent, extremely frail, and/or chronically ill residents who do not have regular visitors who can monitor their care.
- Residents with Alzheimer’s disease or related dementias who are resistant to care and difficult to handle.
- Residents living in institutions with staff shortages, high turnover, and inadequate supervision and training increase the risk of mistreatment.

Who are the abusers?

- More than two-thirds of the abusers are family members serving in a caregiving role.
- Abusers often have alcohol and/or drug abuse problems.
- Abusers may be dependent on the disabled adult for housing or money.
- Abuser’s may be suffering from stress brought on by the strain of caregiving coupled with marital problems, lack of money, overcrowded living conditions, or lack of needed health or social services.
- Abusers may have emotional problems such as:
 - Resentment of dependency;
 - Retaliation against a parent for past mistreatment; or lack of love and friendship in the relationship.

Intervention is based on:

- An adult's right to make his or her own decisions
- Interventions which promote the greatest individual dignity and independence
- Least disruption to lifestyle

Warning Signs

Physical and Emotional Abuse

- Fractures/broken bones/sprains.
- Burns/bruises/marks from ropes or other restraints
- Lacerations/welts/black eyes.
- Internal injuries
- Torn, stained or bloody underclothing.
- Unexplained venereal disease or genital infections.
- Injuries that are not consistent with medical findings
- Contradictory explanations are given by the victim and the caregiver
- Threats/insults/harassment/name calling/shaming/taunting.
- Yelling/verbal abuse/belittling/ridiculing/intimidating
- Withholding needed food or medication/permitting unnecessary pain.
- Isolation or silence.
- Abandonment

Exploitation

- Unusual activity in bank accounts.
- Power of attorney given or will drawn up when the person lacks the capacity.
- Personal belongings such as jewelry, silver, coins, and other valuables missing.
- Checks/documents signed when person cannot write; signatures on checks don't resemble the person's handwriting.
- Person complains that he/she used to have money and doesn't anymore; depleted bank accounts
- Eviction notice arrives when person thought he/she owned the house
- Client says he/she has been signing papers and know what they are
- Caretaker tries to isolate the person from old friends and family; tells person no one wants to see him/her; gradually gains control
- Client seems more concerned with the person's finances that the quality of his or her care
- Client denied his or her right to privacy
- Forcible eviction and/or placement in a nursing home
- "living off" another's persons' income or assets
- Sexual exploitation

